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Erratum

The Works Cited for this article were not published with this article, and were later published as an Errata in Disclosure, v. 20. To see that Errata, please visit: <http://uknowledge.uky.edu/disclosure/vol20/iss1/17/>

Gretchen E. Henderson

Consumed with (and by) Collecting:

Museology as Narrative Strategy

Exhibit A: Novel *Museuming*, *Museumed* Novels

The German word *museal* ("museumlike") describes "objects to which the observer no longer has a vital relationship and which are in the process of dying," writes Theodor Adorno in his "Valéry Proust Museum" (175). Locating the "mortality of artifacts" in "family sepulchers of works of art" (i.e., museums as mausoleums), Adorno juxtaposes two writers' views of the museum to consider how an artwork's creation "contains within itself the impulse of its own destruction" (178). Organized as a series of "Exhibits," this essay finds a similar affinity, since its creation is consumed *with* (and eventually *by*) an inclination toward destruction.

Adorno's etymologic emphasis has remained timely after a half-century, particularly today, when museology is in constant flux—straddling disciplines, debates about curatorial and conservation issues, and conflicts about provenance and the restitution of acquisitions—to the point that museums can become tangled in "a politically orchestrated game of musical chairs" (Price 103).¹ As objects are shuffled among art, anthropology, and archeology collections, sometimes across national borders, some advocates favor a universal or encyclopedic museum-model to connect viewers with a "cosmopolitan culture"; others believe that modern

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nations sharing geography with past civilizations should manage their extant artifacts.² Given the global scope of these sociocultural debates, museology can help to illuminate literary representations that become entangled in comparable conflicts.

In recent decades, museums and literature have come together in theoretical realms. W.J.T. Mitchell, Nicholas Mirzoeff, and other scholars have framed such intersections in the context of Visual Culture. Artistically-driven initiatives arise in literary subgenres, yielding collections like Barbara K. Fischer's anthology, *Museum Mediations: Reframing Ekphrasis in Contemporary Poetry*, and "Meditations" that punctuate Bettina Messias Carbonell's *Museum Studies: An Anthology of Contexts*.³ Museums and literature also meet in the event of authorial retrospectives that utilize archival materials (for instance, exhibitions of drafts and ephemera relating to manuscript production, literary schools, and the like). With regard to "thing theory" and "object lessons," Bill Brown has drawn upon Michel Foucault's *The Order of Things*, Jean Baudrillard's *The System of Objects*, and other scholarship to suggest how schemes of taxonomy have privileged order to the extent that objects themselves seem to disappear from view (Brown 90, 146). Said another way: an inanimate object's worth becomes animated by its potential loss. As the object becomes possessed and repossessed, it straddles varied cultural notions of "object" and "subject" (not to mention "museum") and defies the "dying" quality that Adorno describes. Adorno himself concludes: "The natural-history collections of the spirit have actually transformed works of art into the hieroglyphics of history and brought them a new content while the old one shrivelled up" (185). The inherent narratives in such movements from "old" to "new" have led cultural theorists to follow an increasingly "textual approach" in museology, "reading the object of analysis like a text for its narrative structures and strategies."⁴

Against this reanimating backdrop, museology itself seems to function as a narrative strategy and prompts me to offer a term—"museumed novel"—as a mode of literary analysis. The modern institution of the *museum* roots back to Hellenic times ("a building connected with or dedicated to the Muses that inspired them"), but the term *museology* did not come into use until the nineteenth century, around the same time as *museuming* and the verb form of *museum*.⁵ *Museumized* and *museumed*: the suffix *-ed* places the word syntactically in the past, while also making the familiar noun transgress to an unfamiliar verb or adjective. Colloquially rare, the word shares similarity with modern theoretical coinages, like the fraught *ghettoized*. Beyond examples cited in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, Gayatri Chakrovorty Spivak has used the archaic construction in her foundational essay on the subaltern: "It goes without saying that *museumized* or curricularized access to ethnic origin—another battle that must be fought—is not identical with preserving subalternity" (2207, italics mine). Similarly, Sherman Alexie adopts *museumed* in his poem, "On the Amtrak from Boston to New York City":

...I have learned
little more about American history during my few days
back East than what I expected and far less
of what we should all know of the tribal stories
whose architecture is 15,000 years older
than the corners of the house that sits
museumed on the hill... (251, italics mine)

For both Spivak and Alexie, a "museum" is not an idolized repository of artworks inspired by the muses, but is laden with cultural baggage; an institution that paradoxically stifles cultures whose objects it purports to preserve. As an etymologic "mausoleum," the word's overtone conveys its "mortality," as Adorno suggests, but also encapsulates colonial and imperial enterprises whose consequences continue to be felt. Indeed, *museum's* syntactic transgression to *museumed* further disturbs the context in which it is found. A novel that is "museumed," then, reanimates its complicated history, implicating itself in sociocultural consequences, even crimes.

This critical—even criminal—attention to "museumed novels" leads to the heart of my argument, since I will be "museuming" through four twentieth-century American novels: Djuna Barnes' *Nightwood* (1936), Flannery O'Connor's *Wise Blood* (1952), Susan Sontag's *The Volcano Lover* (1992), and Tim O'Brien's *In the Lake of the Woods* (1994). I am interested in how these novels, and novels generally, can straddle museological grounds as a kind of narrative strategy, utilizing collected and managed objects to make readers complicit in cultural crimes. Roger Silverstone has referred to "the particularities of the museum as medium: with its role as story-teller, as myth maker, as imitator of reality," and Susan Pearce has suggested that "more closely and with more detail than the other genres," novels "contain imaginary or virtual objects to which we give the same status as physical things, and which interact with the characters to create the mesh of action, and serve as the organizing poetic principle of the narrative" (Silverstone 143; "The Strange Story of the Thing" 37).⁶ To put these two mediums—museum and novel—in conversation with each other, I have chosen four novels that share a general heritage (twentieth-century American) historically following both the formalization of museology and the emergence of the modern novel: "not just an entertaining description of life, but something that could 'compete with life' and improve upon it," creating a "dialectical relationship, a fundamental back-and-forth, in which the realities of modernity make the novel [and the museum, I would add] more artful, and then the artful techniques developed give back new realities" (Matz 16, 20).⁷ Put more simply, these novels (varying in lengths, structures, points of view, and degrees of self-consciousness, which move toward a "postmodernist deprivileging of any one discourse") have led me to think about museology's inherent complexities and the propensity to collect, specifically in relation to "crime"—as defined by *Nightwood's* infamous Dr. Matthew O'Connor: "the door to an accumulation, a way to lay hands on the shudder of a past that is still vibrating" (qtd. in Carbonell 8; Barnes 119).⁸ By "museuming" through them, I mean to implicate myself in a related act via rhetoric that holds meaning through collecting, preserving, and exhibiting words. Making myself complicit in this weighty act by curating "Exhibits" with quotations from novels and scholarship, I am going so far as to liken my writing of this essay to crime, to explore a few ideas about what criteria might constitute a "museumed novel."

Exhibit E: Witnessing "Their" Possession: Museuming in Djuna Barnes' *Nightwood* (1936)

As a quintessentially modern novel, *Nightwood* provides an apropos starting point for museuming in this essay, given the quotation that marks my thesis ("to lay hands on the shudder of a past that is still vibrating") and the text's abundance of museums. Told in eight

chapters, beginning with a time catapult from 1880 to 1910, then into the 1920s (the heart of the novel), *Nightwood* traverses Vienna, Paris, Berlin, and the New York countryside, following the ever-wandering Robin Vote ("the infected carrier of the past") through her failed relationships with her husband, Felix Volkbein, and her lovers, Nora Flood and Jenny Petherbridge (37). The ever-wandering Robin abandons her husband and child, then Nora, in favor of Jenny, who is caught between "two tortures—the past that she can't share, and the present that she can't copy," before sliding toward her almost animal darkness (124). In the shadows of Old Europe and America between the wars, an array of thwarted relationships entwine with myths, emphasizing tensions between primitive and civilized, night and day, old and new, memory and forgetting, life and death.

Ivan Karp and Steven Lavine have focused on the "poetics" of exhibition display and the idea of "voice," akin to narratologist Gérard Genette, who considers "the way narrating itself is implicated in the narrative" (qtd. in Carbonell 5). In *Nightwood*, through tangled foreshadowing and remembrance, a reader is made complicit in the characters' crimes of the heart, one might say, suggested by Dr. Matthew O'Connor (an Irish-American expatriate, transvestite, unlicensed gynecologist, alcoholic) when he tells Nora that she's "made [Robin] a legend" (125). References to legends and history, memories and dreams convolute *Nightwood's* chronology, not to mention the psyches of characters who cannot move beyond their emotional wounds. Museums appear frequently, with reference to characters' abodes and actual museums, alongside "living statues," artworks, relics, circuses, theaters, cathedrals, exhibitions, and self-displays (13). Robin is compared to a "figurehead in a museum," Felix (with his faux pedigree) is "the 'collector' of his own past," and living spaces are described as "museum[s] of their encounter[s]" (38, 10, 5, 56). Jane Marcus and other scholars have linked the "museum of their encounter" to the Bakhtinian carnival, as an un-American space that Nora desires to create for herself and Robin, filled with heterosexual objects imposed on a lesbian relationship. By extension, Deborah Tyler-Bennett has considered the "museum" as "Nora's attempt to create a space which is other: an eclectic mixture of the religious and secular, which is intensely personal" (49). Like complicities that complicate *Wise Blood*, *The Volcano Lover*, and *In the Lake of the Woods*, as I will discuss, *Nightwood* inhabits an interstitial space between possession and dispossession.

Attempting to repossess their losses, real and imagined, the characters seem to consume one another's pasts and futures. One of Nora's dreams involves her grandmother's room in America (replete with the portrait of a relative who died in the Civil War), even though the envisioned room does not resemble the actual room that had been. The dream of the room is "saturated with the lost presence of her grandmother, who seemed in the continual process of leaving it" (63). Similarly, Nora's heart is saturated with the lost presence of Robin, a loss that is characterized almost like an exhibit with its prized relic: "In Nora's heart lay the fossil of Robin" (56). Possession lies at the heart of *Nightwood*—and at the heart of museological debates—all the way to the novel's culmination in "The Possessed." Dr. O'Connor has already foreshadowed that "one dog will find [Robin and Nora] both" (106). By the time he announces "Now...the end" (concluding the penultimate chapter), *Nightwood* undergoes a kind of repossession (166). The story almost consumes itself; like Horkheimer and Adorno's analysis of Enlightenment, the novel that has arisen from myth returns to that realm (27).⁹ In this final chapter, both notions of "possessed" come together: *owned* and *inhabited by a spirit*—explicitly, if enigmatically, so:

when Robin heads to Nora's chapel, Jenny accuses her of "a sensuous communion with unclean spirits" (168). A reader becomes complicit in this "sensuous communion" by witnessing a kind of possession beyond the grave, pure as instinct, embodied in the women's barking with Nora's dog. "Now" able to be chronologically and spatially placed to a degree, "the end" branches outside time, just as Nora is composed of "the tree coming forward in her, an undocumented record of time" (50). Having germinated in the prison of history, *Nightwood* can only branch into the realm of myth. And myth is of course where we find the Muses: the root of the word "museum."

Exhibit M: Destabilizing "MVSEVM" in Flannery O'Connor's *Wise Blood* (1952)

Derived from shrines to the Muses, museums enjoy a long history evolving in Western tradition from Greco-Roman temples, through Christian churches and monasteries, into medieval and Renaissance apothecaries, anatomy theaters, and curiosity cabinets (*Wunderkammern* and *Kunstammern*), palaces into more modern museums.¹⁰ The rise of secularism and science in the Enlightenment covered various trends of collecting. "Marvels" became emblems of status and intellect, increasingly taxonomic: correlated with botanical and zoological gardens, world fairs and "civilizing" displays, carnivals and other forms of human entertainment. Beyond the nineteenth-century's formalization of museology as a discipline, recent developments include "New Museology," which reexamines the roles of museums in society.¹¹ All of this is to say (via an admittedly compressed history): museums, as inanimate spaces that house inanimate objects, have evolved by constant reanimation, like items contextualized and recontextualized within their domains.

The very process of reanimation complicates the institutions that purport to represent things, the things themselves, and those people who visit them—a theme that enlivens Flannery O'Connor's *Wise Blood*. More novella than novel in length, *Wise Blood* unfolds in fourteen chapters that chronicle the "conflicting wills" of Hazel Motes, after his return to the American South (Tennessee) in the middle of the twentieth century. After being released from the army and finding his family home abandoned, he becomes a preacher of the Church Without Christ, pursuing sin as he renounces its existence, attracting a number of duplicitous characters (including Asa Hawks, a preacher who pretends to be blind; Sabbath Lily Hawks, Asa's seductress daughter who aids his schemes; Enoch Emory, a foolhardy teenager who works in a zoo and, among other activities, steals a mummy and gorilla suit; and Mrs. Flood, Haze's greedy landlady who plans to marry him for his pension). As O'Connor follows Haze through interactions with these characters, until his death, *Wise Blood* illuminates some mystery between truth and fact, like Gaston Bachelard describes, where "the duality of subject and object is iridescent, shimmering, unceasingly active in its inversions" (xv).

Inverting subject and object, truth and fact, and other dualities, *Wise Blood* manipulates museums, even etymologically: MVSEVM.¹² MVSEVM appears in the context of public signs (FROSTY BOTTLE, CITY FOREST PARK, MEN'S TOILET, WHITE.) capitalized to make such signs appear strange. Because Enoch does not know what MVSEVM means, readers are able to see the letters through his eyes, not as dead but alive. The letters vibrate with mystery. Daniel F. Littlefield, Jr. has compared the museum to other civic institutions in the story (the zoo, pool, park, movie theater), "all of which represent the

institutions in the story (the zoo, pool, park, movie theater), "all of which represent the leisure afforded by the prosperous society," a material prosperity "basic to [the characters'] distorted sense of spiritual purpose" (128, 130). For Enoch, the MVSEVM in the park takes on a kind of religious presence ("the strange word made him shiver"), so he is described as "exalted" like a "visionary" as he follows the impulses of his "wise blood" and undertakes a bizarre religious ritual (*Three Novels* 50, 51, 70, 40). The mummy that he steals becomes the "new Jesus," placed in a "tabernacle-like" cabinet that otherwise holds the slop-jar, before eventually being broken by Haze (89, 67).

Georges Bataille has written that: "A museum is like a lung of a great city; each Sunday the crowd flows like blood into the museum and emerges purified and fresh" (25). Loaded with corporeality, Bataille's reference to "Sunday" evokes the analogy of museum as church—a conflation that occurs in O'Connor's novel, more as corrupting than purifying.¹³ By complicating MVSEVM and its captive objects (namely the mummy), *Wise Blood* succeeds as a "museumed novel," implicating itself in sociocultural consequences, even crimes. Enoch's "wise blood" urges him to show the mummy to a "special person," to the point that if he does not, he feels like he will "steal a car or rob a bank or jump out of a dark alley onto a woman" (41). Haze runs over Solace Layfield, his "twin," among other violent acts toward others and himself. With regard to collecting, another crime-scene appears outside of the present action: the carnival where Haze remembers going as a boy with his father, sneaking inside the "SINSational" tent with the naked woman in the box (31). Afterwards, he fills his shoes with pebbles and stones and walks in them "to satisfy Him," as if collecting penances, looking for a divine sign that he never receives (33). After Haze blinds himself with quicklime as an adult, he repeats that action with his shoes, telling his landlady Mrs. Flood that he doesn't have time to preach, only to walk around in shoes with pebbles and glass, "to pay." When she asks, "Pay for what?" he says, "You can't see" (115).

As varied lenses (eyes and glasses, physical and metaphysical blindnesses) engage O'Connor's notion of the grotesque, "the characters have an inner coherence, if not always a coherence to their social framework. Their fictional qualities lean away from typical social patterns, toward mystery and the unexpected" (*Mystery and Manners* 40). The theme of (not) "seeing" relates to Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque, rife with spectacles and social inversions (in venues like the childhood carnival, the zoo, the MVSEVM), not to neglect the larger racial backdrop of the American South.¹⁴ Like in *Nightwood*, objects make the text museum-like: from Haze's preacher's and panama hats, to Enoch's inherited purse pouch, the stolen mummy and gorilla suit. Building upon O'Connor's own theory of the grotesque, Marshall Bruce Gentry has considered the consequences of "Individual and Communal Grotesquerie": "At one extreme, the grotesque character is displaced, isolated, necessarily an individual in a hostile society. At the other extreme, the grotesquerie of a character is a sign of that character's participation in the redemption of his community" (487). Such redemption is arguable by the end of *Wise Blood*, if taken on the novel's terms. After Haze's death, Mrs. Flood gazes a long time into his hollow eye sockets, then shuts her eyes and sees a pin point of light: "as if she had finally got to the beginning of something she couldn't begin" (*Three Novels* 120). As *Wise Blood* concludes, these words suggest a potential (if not actualized) beginning, not only for Mrs. Flood but also for the central character, who becomes a pinpoint of light, no longer in a Haze.

Exhibit S: Witnessing "You": Museuming in Susan Sontag's *The Volcano Lover* (1992)

In "Museum/Studies and the 'Eccentric Space' of an Anthology," Bettina Messias Carbonell describes how "a number of museum exhibitions now appear inclined to emulate the 'dialogic imagination' of the novel, finding ways to criticize the museum itself and incorporate parody and travesty of its own and other canonical genres....establishing a 'zone of contact with the present in all its openendedness'" (8).¹⁵ Beyond Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of heteroglossia ("many-voicedness"), Linda Hutcheon has described how "historiographic metafiction" works at once within and against realist historical narratives, in contrast to what Susan Stewart calls "distressed genres" that replicate antique forms and lack irony.¹⁶ Considering these varied approaches, curators and novelists alike can engage alternative and even competing narratives in their mediums, where one strategy may subvert another—as is the case with Susan Sontag's *The Volcano Lover: A Romance*. Subverting both Romance and Reason while working within their trappings, *The Volcano Lover* entwines multiple narrative strategies.¹⁷ The novel unfolds in four parts: the first two parts (each with seven chapters) follow the "volcano-mad" Sir William Hamilton (British ambassador to the Neapolitan court, otherwise called "the Cavalier," defined by his obsessive collecting), before a pithy third part inhabits his perspective as he dies (not marked as a chapter, rather dated "6 April 1803"), culminating in the fourth and final part: four chapters all told by women who are his contemporaries. In the process of shifting narrative perspectives, readers find themselves and Sontag increasingly complicit in the crimes of the Cavalier and his companions.

Traversing centuries (1992 to 1772 to 1944), the Prologue establishes a slippery quality to the point-of-view that persists through the lengthy first two parts of the book, slowly closing the gap between "he," "she," "you," and "I." Self-references slip in and out of more omniscient narration that shifts tenses, lacks dialogue with quotation marks, and streams description into characters' consciousnesses, into the author's point of view, into a reader's. The chameleon-like narrator defines the Cavalier in relation to his era, correlating the general propensity to collect with crime: from intimate indiscretions to national revolutions. Claiming that "Every collector is potentially (if not actually) a thief," the narrator compares a "huge museum" to "booty," and calls Napoleon an "art predator" (73, 201, 214). The Cavalier's second wife, the lowbrow but beautiful Emma Hart (who has an infamous affair with Lord Nelson), is called his "most valuable possession" after the Portland vase, which loses its value after being replicated by Wedgwood (138). The novel includes living statues alongside more traditional ones, variations on Pygmalion and related tales. Sontag's covert commentary incorporates contemporary allusions that would be impossible in a work of historical fiction set in the late eighteenth century: "rain-in-Spain lessons," "ruins" in "Berlin today," the "Disneyesque fate of Ludwig II's Neuschwanstein," and the artificial volcano in front of a Las Vegas hotel (133, 162, 344, 327). Erupting the notion of "Romance," she makes herself (and us) complicit in varied activities: "what happens once can happen again...you may have to wait a long time. We come back. We come back" (8).

Given this narrative set-up, the concluding chapters of the book are particularly important in making readers complicit in these characters' crimes. After the brief Part III passes in the dying Cavalier's viewpoint, Part IV remains. The four chapters told in first person by women include: Catherine (his first wife), then Mary Cadogan (Emma's mother

who apparently has been apart from her daughter only a few weeks since her sixteenth birthday, yet there's barely reference to her until this chapter), Emma (who at one point is compared to Lady MacBeth), and finally the as-of-yet-unseen Eleanora de Fonseca Pimental (a prisoner of the revolution who has the final say: "Damn them all"). This layering of female—as opposed to feminist, since only one could be called feminist—"I's" makes drastic departures from the majority of text, as a dominating narrative of this era is repossessed by widely-varying women narrators, including Sontag. Eleanora acknowledges Sontag near the end: "Sometimes I had to forget that I was a woman to accomplish the best of which I was capable. Or I would lie to myself about how complicated it is to be a woman. Thus do all women, including the author of this book" (419). Given the narrative strategy, we (*echo*: "We come back") become complicit and capable of these crimes of collecting—"including the author of this book," who takes liberties with many historical events and personages (Lord Nelson, Goethe, the Marquis de Sade, Marie Antoinette, Joseph Banks, and so on) and compares her own list-making to the larger impulse to collect. Notably, she does not include a bibliography and on the verso of the title page vaguely acknowledges her debt to "many modern historical studies and biographies as well as from memoirs and letters of the period." In the vein of James Joyce's "stolentelling" and Kathy Acker's "plagiarizing," Sontag herself becomes the kind of collector-thief that she exposes. As a "museumed novel," then, *The Volcano Lover* succeeds on these terms, leaving us complicit and holding the vibrating collection that is the object of the book. "There's a volcano in my breast," reads the novel's epigraph from Mozart's *Così fan tutte*, just as Sontag herself uses the volcano to "project" the "complicity with destructiveness, of anxiety about your ability to feel" (82).¹⁸

Exhibit U: Feeling the Destabilized "I": Museuming in Tim O'Brien's *In the Lake of the Woods* (1994)

"The construction of such a radical division between self and other," writes Mieke Bal (as she deconstructs narrative strategies in the American Museum of Natural History), "works to deny the conflict in contemporary society where cultural diversity is present, so much so that the construction of 'them' is no longer possible" (572).¹⁹ Like in *The Volcano Lover*, the construction of self and other lies at the heart of Tim O'Brien's *In the Lake of the Woods*. Structured kaleidoscopically, the novel follows John and Kathy Wade, who retreat to Minnesota's boundary waters after his landslide loss for the race for U.S. Senate, before she disappears. Compressing middle decades of the twentieth century into a few days in 1986, *In the Lake of the Woods* resists closure, testing psychological realism without allying itself to any historical genre like the Romance. More traditional chapters (with changing titles: some following the present action, others detailing John's past) alternate with seven collage-like chapters of textual "Evidence" and eight chapters entitled "Hypothesis," all examining potential ways that Kathy went missing. Given the importance of "Exhibits"—less like a gallery, more like a legal trial—the crime of this "museumed novel" arises from a different mode of collecting than in *The Volcano Lover*. The Cavalier thinks a thief who steals a famous painting must feel "deprived" at keeping his collection hidden (133). In contrast, John Wade has grown accustomed to keeping certain knowledge hidden, especially from himself.

A reader becomes complicit in John's ability to forget, to play the Sorcerer, to make things (his mother's scarves and copper pennies, his wife, a village) vanish. John cannot

remember the events of his final night with Kathy and realizes only by the end of the day that she is missing. Ambiguous objects around the house are likened to "clues," whose uncertain meaning amplifies with fog, "swirling and changing shape" (17, 5). O'Brien uses repetition, dislocations, and reassociations of objects (iron tea kettle, photos of a boat and destroyed houseplants, unplugged phone, inventory of magic tricks, quotations by family and friends and acquaintances and texts, Court Martial testimony, wooden hoe) that accumulate potentially—but not definitively—to prove John Wade's guilt. The phone first appears casually unplugged, then is wrapped in a towel under the sink, then is discovered by a second party that interprets its meaning as part of a crime scene. Re-presenting archival elements, O'Brien reveals information about John's father's suicide, his obsession with magic, his stalking of Kathy, and his role in the My Lai massacre. By recasting the objects in different hypothetical scenarios and recontextualizing them against material about John's past and larger cultural histories, a reader awakens to the horrific capacities of John and the general human condition.

Just as in other "museumed novels" (brimming with spectacles and self-displays), the theme of (not) seeing also marks *In the Lake of the Woods*. When John Wade corresponds with Kathy from Vietnam, he writes, "Sorcerer can see" and obsesses about her eyes (at one point wanting to "suck them from their sockets....[and] roll them around like lemon drops," 39, 71). As a child, John does magic tricks in front of a basement mirror, and that mirror transforms into the secret mirror in his adult head, flickering so "unities of time and space had unraveled" (51). The ominous probability for Kathy's fate involves his pouring boiling water from the teakettle onto her eyes, which is not to neglect the "public eye" from which the couple retreats to the woods in the first place, as well as the authorial "I" that emerges in footnotes:

I arrived in-country a year after John Wade, in 1969, and walked exactly the ground he walked...through the villages of Thuan Yen and My Khe and Co Luy. I know what happened that day. I know how it happened. I know why....The overwhelming otherness. This is not to justify what occurred on March 16, 1968, for in my view such justifications are both futile and outrageous. Rather, it's to bear witness to the mystery of evil. (113, 199)

To some degree, such bearing of witness—indirectly or directly—emerges from "museumed novels," which reanimate pasts that seem static or dead, but are not: "the story of the changing but still vital complicity" (Bal 588). In *In the Lake of the Woods*, John feels within the empty cabin "a new stiffness to the place, like a museum, everything frozen and hollow" (88). The novel's footnotes and quotations make it more "museumed," lending a caption-like quality, as they comment on varying portraits of husband and wife. As John and readers museum within this museum, so does O'Brien, who makes himself complicit in footnotes. This doubling of John's character, by extension to O'Brien and others, destabilizes the reader's position outside of the narrative in time and space. The narrative at times attests to the sense "as if it were still happening" (7). By likening the setting to a museum and filling his text with animated inanimate objects, O'Brien gives objects and even words (like "*Kill Jesus!*") totemic power. Mirrors reflect and refract John outside his own life, within national history and politics (from Vietnam to Custer's Last Stand, where

"John" was a name used for Native Americans, the novel tells us) and psychology (specifically trauma theory), implicating his actions with our own. Ultimately, we are left with what is evident but absent, with a blurred boundary between truth and fact, having to judge for (and of) ourselves.

Exhibit Z: Museumed Novels, Novel Museuming

A ubiquitous phrase marks many maps—YOU ARE HERE—guideposts through labyrinths like the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Natural History, and the Louvre. Following cues of curators, while bound by a single entrance and exit (at least, in a traditional gallery), "YOU" do not follow a single, predetermined path. Each vectored variation allows for alternate paths, much like my essay may have proceeded in varied ways, more than these "Exhibits" tested the potential of viewing novels through a museological lens. By increasingly alluding to "YOU," I have attempted to make meaning as a visitor to a museum, like Riannon Mason has described how "the textual analogy... can shift emphasis away from the curator-as-author and his/her intentions toward the visitor-as-reader and his/her responses. The visitor is therefore understood to be a crucial participant in the process of meaning-making" (27).²⁰ Inviting the same of "YOU," I have written an essay consumed with collecting that ultimately begs the question: if we participate in like-minded acts, even at the level of reading and writing, are we complicit in (and fated to be consumed by) analogous crimes?

In "Museums and Historical Amnesia," William H. Truettner writes that "most museum administrators are willing to group works under broad historical settings, but more critical insights, the kind that dig deeply into the darker, more destructive events of an era, are still out of bounds....not because museums wish to deny shifting historical perspectives, or the misdeeds they may uncover, but because they wish to keep art clear of history—the kind that would seem to degrade it. And works of art, many recent scholars have noted, are complicit in this strategy" (360).²¹ The notion of an artwork's "complicity" may sound outlandish at first glance, but Truettner acknowledges that curators and educators are searching for more transparent approaches "to make works of art come alive as a complex mix of ideas and aesthetic strategies." Novels are fictive, not trying to pass themselves off as fact, as is the case with museum narratives; however, storytelling is inherently present in both mediums.²² Viewed through a museological framework, novels can help to illuminate the "complex mix of ideas" (of creation and acquisition, of possession and repossession, of aesthetic strategies) that arise when cultural and other critical studies converge and converse to complicate reductive readings of objects, alongside histories and myths of their consumption.

Djuna Barnes' *Nightwood*, Flannery O'Connor's *Wise Blood*, Susan Sontag's *The Volcano Lover*, and Tim O'Brien's *In the Lake of the Woods* succumb to and resist the propensity to collect, possess, and exhibit. In different ways, each of these novels acts "museumed," implicating itself directly or indirectly in sociocultural consequences and, even, crimes. Collectively, they complicate our past and present by reanimating a cross-section of narrative strategies shaped by literature, museums, and their shared cultural contexts. With this cross-section in mind, I am left to consider what strategies might further develop "museumed" studies of narrative. Beyond the contemporary museological debates outlined at the beginning of this essay, Museum Studies programs have arisen between varied disciplines, physically and virtually, including Second Life and Museum

Informatics.²³ Illustrated literary works (with photographs, films, graphics, hypertext, and/or other media) afford fruitful materials for further analysis, which is not to neglect the "museumed" potential of poetry and creative nonfiction. Future studies also might explore works that identify themselves expressly as "museums" or "galleries," whether organized around "exhibits" or sustaining explicit curatorial agendas. Whatever the approach, museum-focused analyses of literature can continue to respond to Truettner's caution about "historical amnesia," to work both within and against its seemingly retrospective tide, to acknowledge that such analyses—including this essay—arise from a like-minded impulse to collect.

Here lies my complicity with activities outlined in these pages—in my museuming—like Sontag writes in *The Volcano Lover*:

Collecting...generates the added pleasure of scorekeeping, of enumeration. Volume and tirelessness of conquest would lose some of its point and savor were there not a ledger somewhere....The list is itself a collection, a sublimated collection. One does not actually have to own the things. To know is to have (luckily, for those without great means). It is already a claim, a species of possession, to think about them in this form. (202)

In addition to this essay, I have been writing a "museumed novel" (entitled *Galerie de Difformité*) that forms itself through generic—as in *genre*: poetic, fictional, scholarly, illustrated—deformation, including "Exhibits," ultimately asking the reader to metamorphose the physical object of the book to participate in a creative act that might be viewed, from one cultural stance, as an act of defamation, in contrast to what otherwise might be considered spiritual, communal, even healing (in the vein of Navajo and Tibetan sandpaintings).²⁴ Apart from that creative project, this essay's form of collecting gestures to a number of "crimes" that "shudder...still vibrating," in an attempt to draw attention forward and back like the two-headed Janus. By looking in both directions, utilizing a scholarly rhetoric to frame "museumed novels," I have been museuming within these "Exhibits" to chart a kind of loss on personal and cultural levels. The implication of what is destroyed suggests that my very act of writing (to echo Adorno's words that introduced this essay) "contains within itself the impulse of its own destruction." This realization leads me to reiterate what value is calculated through loss, to recognize my own complicity in classifying through this narrative: which holds meaning through collecting, preserving, and exhibiting words. And in so doing, I must consider not only the genre's potential metamorphosis, but also its unfathomable loss. By loss, I do not mean falling out-of-print or erasure from a hard drive. In *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation*, Jonathan Lear describes "real loss" through the story of Plenty Coups, the last great chief of the Crow nation (32).²⁵ Lear describes what Plenty Coups said after the buffalo went away—"nothing happened"—and analogizes the situation for a contemporary readership by offering two hypotheticals (38). In the first, you go to a restaurant and order a buffalo burger but are told that you cannot have one, since the last buffalo has been killed. In the second, there is no cultural institution of the restaurant, and no meaning for "ordering." Lear's example leads me to wonder about your very act of reading this essay, beyond my writing it. Both practices indicate that we give meaning to this activity, which is only one

aspect of our multilayered lives. Yet can we imagine the "real loss" of any or all practices that we currently enact? What if our activities did not favor collecting and keeping, but centered instead around sharing or giving away? And if the latter, what form would sharing and giving take, rhetorically?²⁶ When Lear describes how Plenty Coups dreams that his people can survive by "listening like the Chickadee," *Radical Hope* asks important questions about the vitality of any cultural narrative and the narrative strategies upon which our lives are built—and their vulnerability (80). I have tried to ask something of that sort from novels and museums, whose future entwines with our own.

Gretchen E. Henderson, Ph.D. received the 2010 Madeleine P. Plonsker Emerging Writer's Prize for her manuscript, *Galerie de Difformité*, from &NOW Books. Fictional and poetic "Exhibits" from this forthcoming book can be found at <<http://difformite.wordpress.com/>>, including an invitation to participate in her collaborative project. Recently nominated for a Pushcart Prize, she is an Affiliated Scholar in English at Kenyon College.

Notes

- ¹ "Museology" is "the science or practice of organizing and managing museums; museum curation" (*OED*). For a more detailed definition, see Bettina Messias Carbonell, ed., *Museum Studies: An Anthology of Contexts* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004) 4-5.
- ² For background about this debate, see Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (New York: Norton, 2006), particularly Ch. 8: "Whose Culture Is It, Anyway?" (115-135); and Mark Busse, "Museums and the Things in Them Should Be Alive," *International Journal of Cultural Property* 15 (2008): 189-200.
- ³ Regarding *Museum Studies*, these "Meditations" conclude each of five sections (approximately 20 pages total of 640 pages) and consist of Alice Friman's poem, "At the Holocaust Museum" ("Like Dante, we too are led / down...", 123); Zora Neale Hurston's editorial "What White Publishers Won't Print" (regarding the "indifference, not to say skepticism, to the internal life of educated minorities" that results in representations of the "convenient 'typical,' leading Hurston to describe 'THE AMERICAN MUSEUM OF UNNATURAL HISTORY,' 216); James Fenton's poem, "The Pitt-Rivers Museum, Oxford" ("You have come upon the fabled lands where myths / Go when they die...", 308); Le Corbusier's "Other Icons: The Museums" (with the cautionary note he wishes to be added to all museums: "Within will be found the most partial, the least convincing documentation of past ages; remember this and be on your guard!" (406-7); and Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's "Secrets of their Encounter" (which analyzes the Museum for African Art's inaugural 1993 exhibit, *Secrecy: African Art That Conceals and Reveals*, organized into six sections that each explored a question: "How does art conceal and reveal secret knowledge? How does art mark physical and social boundaries? How does art express the secrets held by each gender? How does art identify owners of secret knowledge? How does art transmit secret knowledge? Can we ever really understand another culture's secrets?" 577). Regarding the enterprise of the anthology, Carbonell concludes that "as Franz Boas and others have taught us, principles of organization and classification bear ongoing inspection. This might apply as much to anthologies as it does to museums, and so a second Table of Contents/Alternative Taxonomy suggests another organizing design for this material" (2, 10; for the "Alternative Taxonomy" related to "Museum Poetics," see xiii-xiv).
- ⁴ In "Cultural Theory and Museum Studies," Rhiannon Mason draws upon works by Mieke Bal, Roger Silverstone, Henrietta Lidchi, Ivan Karp and Steven Lavine, among others, to speak of this "textual approach"; see *A Companion to Museum Studies*, ed. Sharon Macdonald (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006) 26. Claiming that "museum studies is exerting, and should continue to exert, a reciprocal influence on cultural theory," Mason summarizes varied textual dimensions of museology, including approaches critiquing the "voice" of exhibits, identifying conflicting textual and spatial narratives, and subdividing museum analysis into interconnected components. "Another useful aspect of the idea of textuality is that it raises the question of unintentional meanings, omissions, or contradictions present within the displays....for their internal consistencies" (26-9).
- ⁵ According to the *OED*, "museology" came into use in 1885, "museuming" in 1875, and "museum" (v.) in 1838. In contrast, the noun form of "museum" appeared a few centuries earlier. Regarding the verb, the entry cites one usage from a letter by Henry James: "I

breakfasted, dined, theatre'd, *museumed*, walked and talked them." A more recent example appears in Jeanette Winterson's *Art Objects: Essays on Ecstasy and Energy* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1995), in which she writes: "Once the novel was *novel*; if we cannot continue to alter it, to expand its boundaries without dropping it into even greater formlessness than the shape tempts, then we can only *museum* it. Literature is not a *museum* it is a living thing" (176, italics of *museum* mine).

⁶ Additionally, Silverstone writes: "The study of narrativity of the museum or the heritage display involves a study of an exhibition's capacity to define a route (material, pedagogic, aesthetic) for the visitor, and to define thereby a particular logic of representation, a particular legitimate and plausible coherence for itself" (143-44).

⁷ Here Matz draws upon Henry James' essay, "The art of fiction" (1884), which insisted that "fiction is one of the *fine arts*," developing a definition of modernism that is more vital than that presented by Ferenc Feher, who wrote in terms of art that modernism "shines with the brilliance of bygone high cultures [being] but an exhibit on display, and no longer a culturally driving force....this 'museification'" (qtd. in Llewellyn Negrin, "On the Museum's Ruins: A Critical Appraisal," *Theory, Culture & Society* 10 (1993): 98). Susan Pearce, Alexandra Bounia, and Paul Martin have highlighted the theme of collecting in fiction from an earlier period, as they write in *The Collector's Voice* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2000): "For many fiction writers, and perhaps particularly the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century novelists and short story writers who are our concern in this volume, the relationship with the material world is the mainspring of some, at least, of their characters' actions. Objects, not people, trigger the complex interactions between persons and plot, in a style appropriate to a world increasingly focusing upon the voyeuristic possibilities of things as consumerism develops" (xix).

⁸ In "Museum Education Embracing Uncertainty," Danielle Rice describes how postmodernism has encouraged a "new model" for museum educators where "interpretation is reciprocal" (qtd. in Carbonell, *Museum Studies*, 8).

⁹ Horkheimer and Adorno write: "The task of cognition does not consist in mere apprehension, classification, and calculation....The more the machinery of thought subjects existence to itself, the more blind its resignation in reproducing existence. Hence enlightenment returns to mythology, which it never really knew how to elude."

¹⁰ Many scholars have written on the history of museums, including Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine, *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* (Washington: Smithsonian, 1991); Eilean Hooper-Greenhill's *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 1992); Tony Bennett's *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London: Routledge, 1995); Andrea Witcomb's *Re-imagining the Museum: Beyond the Mausoleum* (London: Routledge, 2003), among other citations in this essay, to name a few.

¹¹ See Peter Vergo, ed., *The New Museology* (London: Reaktion, 1989), wherein he describes efforts to prevent museums from becoming "living fossils" (3-4). See also Andrea Hauenschild, *Claims and reality of new museology: case studies in Canada, the United States and Mexico* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Museum Studies, 1998). Given that New Museology tends to be more cultural and political in approach, it may be worth echoing T.S. Eliot's Introduction to *Nightwood*: "To regard this group of people as a horrid sideshow of freaks is...to miss the point" (xvi).

¹² *Wise Blood* frequently negotiates "truth" versus "fact." For Hazel Motes, who preaches the Church Without Christ, there's "only one truth—that Jesus was a liar," and that behind all truths, "there's no truth" (*Three Novels* 62-3, 84). In contrast, the preacher who pretends to be blind, Asa Hawks, says: "Jesus is a fact" (26). O'Connor writes elsewhere: "Hazel Motes' integrity lies in his not being able to [get rid of the ragged figure who moves from tree to tree in the back of his mind]. Does one's integrity ever lie in what he is *not* able to do? I think usually it does, for free will does not mean one will, but many wills conflicting in one man." Qtd. in Donald E. Hardy, *Narrating Knowledge in Flannery O'Connor's Fiction* (Columbia: U of South Carolina P, 2002) 85.

¹³ In *Museum Studies*, Bettina Messias Carbonell has described the changing connotations of the museum, not to mention the study of museums, which are "now less reverential ('religious'), less confined to a single domain of inquiry ('domestic' professional and/or academic spheres), more heterogeneous and dialogic, engendering work in a variety of fields from a variety of subject positions, becoming 'a major place of convocation' for cultural and political debate" (1).

¹⁴ See M.M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Cambridge, MA: MIT P, 1968).

¹⁵ Referring to Bakhtin, Carbonell further correlates the museum with the novel, identifying the rise of both mediums in the eighteenth century.

¹⁶ See M.M. Bakhtin, "From *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*" and Linda Hutcheon, "Historiographic Metafiction," *Theory of the Novel: A Historical Approach*, ed. Michael McKeon (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2000) 321-353, 830-850; Susan Stewart, "Notes on Distressed Genres," *Crimes of Writing: Problems in the Containment of Representations* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1991) 66-101.

¹⁷ Sontag's practice of pastiche is detailed by Julie C. Hayes in "Fictions of Enlightenment: Sontag, Süskind, Norfolk, Kurzweil," *Bucknell Review* 41:2 (1998): 28-29.

¹⁸ The epigraph's translation here comes from the libretto of Mozart's *Così fan Tutte*, trans. Burton D. Fisher (Miami, FL: Opera Journeys, 2003) 50, italics mine.

¹⁹ Near the end of "Telling, Showing, Showing Off," Bal writes: "The repressed story is the story of the representational practice exercised in this museum, the story of the changing but still vital *complicity* between domination and knowledge, possession and display, stereotyping and realism, between exhibition and the repression of history" (588, italics mine).

²⁰ To echo Adorno: "[M]useums certainly emphatically demand something of the observer, just as every work of art does" (185).

²¹ One documentary project, *The Rape of Europa* (2006; based on the 1994 book by Lynn H. Nicholas and subtitled *The Fate of Europe's Treasures in the Third Reich and the Second World War*), provides a glimpse of the duplicitous paths that artworks and artifacts can travel.

²² In *The Predicament of Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1988), James Clifford has described ethnographic studies as "constructed domains of truth, serious fictions" (10), and Llewellyn Negrin concludes about art museums in "On The Museum's Ruins": "the order that is imputed to Nature or to History is not an objective reality as is assumed, but is a projection of our own subjective categories of thought onto the world" (120).

²³ Related to virtual museums are projects like William Gillespie's "Word Museum," programmed by Jason Rodriguez and David Dao at the Brown University CAVE: an "ostensibly literary digital art installation in a virtual reality environment" wherein a viewer moves through "aircraft-hanger sized rooms...confronting textual sculptures and paintings, some static, most kinetic." See William Gillespie, *Iowa Review Web*, "Word Museum," 2006, Web, 15 Dec. 2009.

²⁴ For more information about *Galerie de Différence* (forthcoming from Lake Forest College Press/&NOW Books), see <http://difformite.wordpress.com/>.

²⁵ Lear writes: "The issue is that the Crow have lost the concepts with which they would construct a narrative. This is a *real loss*." He goes on to explain: "What is striking about young Plenty Coups's dream—and the interpretation that the tribe gave to it—is that it was used not merely to predict a future event; it was used by the tribe to struggle with the intelligibility of events that lay at the horizon of their ability to understand" (68).

²⁶ For further consideration of this question, see *The Logic of the Gift: Toward an Ethic of Generosity*, ed. Alan D. Schrift (New York: Routledge, 1997).